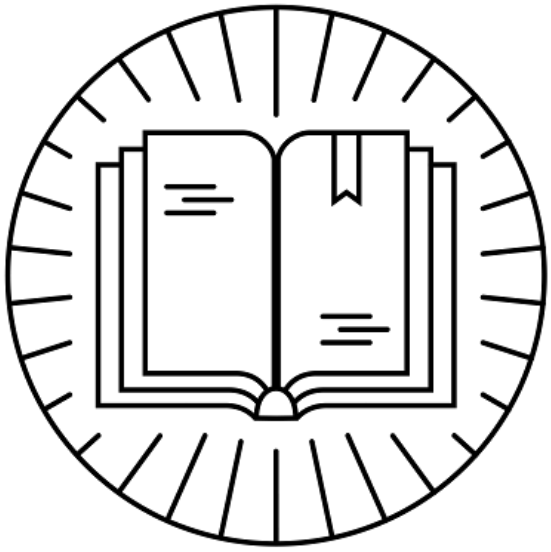
7th Grade



INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

INTERPRETATION

COURSEPACK

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AUTHORS AND THEIR BOOKS

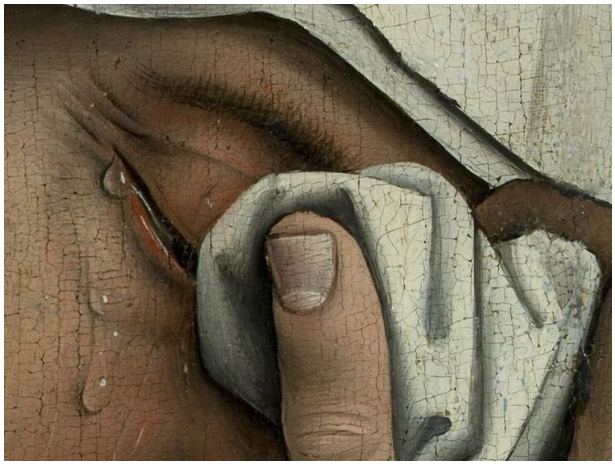
THE GENRE OF PSALM 1

The book of Psalms is considered part of wisdom literature in the Bible, along with Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. Wisdom literature consists of writings that emphasize attaining wisdom[1] in all areas of life. These writings give us basic principles that, if followed, generally result in a balanced, flourishing life. Studying these important principles leads to a deeper understanding of how to live life well, so this genre should be valued as much as the rest of Scripture. The wisdom books often deal with things that seem mundane and insignificant, but the fact that they are a part of God's inspired Word demonstrates that even the smallest things matter to Him.[2]

Like all wisdom literature in the Bible, the Psalms are also Hebrew poetry. Unlike English poetry, which emphasizes rhyme and meter, Hebrew poetry uses figures of speech and parallelism to make its point. It communicates thoughts and feelings through vivid images, similes, and metaphors.

The Psalms describe the innermost feelings of their authors, making them some of the most beloved and relatable passages in the Bible. The psalmists don't shy from their emotions, good or bad, but pour them out to God. As one scholar says, "In every experience of our own, no matter how deep the pain or how great the frustration or how exhilarating the joy, we can find psalms which echo our innermost being, psalms which God uses to bring comfort or to confirm release."[3] There are several categories of Psalms that reflect different human emotions, such as praise, historical, relational, imprecatory (prayers for justice)[4], penitential (sorrowful, repentant), and Messianic. However, prayer and praise characterize Psalms as a whole.

Psalm 1 is a wisdom Psalm that stands as an introduction to the rest of the book. It portrays a common theme in Psalms and a foundational truth throughout Scripture: the blessedness of the righteous and the future of the wicked. Through a series of contrasts, it paints a picture of the flourishing life one will have by meditating on and obeying God's Word and the misery of the person who tries to live for himself. It offers the reader a choice between two ways of life that will either lead to a blessed life or sure judgment.[5]



Weyden, *Descent from the Cross* **(detail), 1443**

1. Wisdom is the correct and moral application of knowledge.
2. Adapted from "The Purpose of Wisdom Literature," Ligonier, last modified January 1, 2015.
3. Lawrence O. Richards, *The Teacher's Commentary*, quoted in J. Hampton Keathley, III, "Psalm 1: Two Ways of Life—A Psalm of Wisdom," Bible.org, accessed April 11, 2023.
4. J. Clinton McCann Jr., "Psalms, Book of," in Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 648.
5. Adapted from Keathley, "Psalm 1: Two Ways of Life—A Psalm of Wisdom."

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Psalm 145:8 echoes the original Exodus 34 proclamation of God's character. Moses' request to see God's glory on Mount Sinai is answered with God's proclamation of His divine name, *"[6]The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, [7]keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:6b–7a).*

The importance of this list cannot be overestimated. These descriptions of God occur in every major division of the Hebrew Bible and then again in the New Testament.[1]

Le Sueur, *Christ Healing the Blind Man,* 1645

Psalm 145 describes God's character, saying He:

- is full of abundant goodness to all (7, 9).
- is righteous in all His ways (7, 17).
- is gracious and merciful (8).
- sustains all who fall and raises up all who are bowed down (14).
- gives food to the hungry (15–16).
- is kind in all His deeds (17).
- is near to all who call upon Him in truth (18).[2]

It should come as no surprise that these same qualities are revealed in the New Testament's revelation of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, Christ is declared to be the believer's Great God and Savior as well as their High Priest and Good Shepherd who would lay down His life for His sheep.

Not only is Jesus characterized by such qualities as greatness, goodness, and grace, but also by glory. Although Jesus' essential glory existed even before the creation of the world, human appreciation of that glory became possible only through His Incarnation. Christ's full glory was displayed at the transfiguration. Yet the glorious nature of Christ became evident in the performance of His mighty acts, such as His miracles. The Lord of glory was crucified, rose from the dead, and afterward, entered "into His glory." He will yet return in power and great glory.[3]

1. Numbers 14:17–19; Psalm 103:6–14; 145:8–9; Joel 2:12–14; John 1:17; 2 Corinthians 13:14. Adapted from Graham A. Cole, "God, Doctrine of," in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, and Daniel J. Treier,, Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 262.
2. Adapted from Steven J. Cole, "Psalm 145: God Fanatics," Bible.org, accessed May 22, 2025
3. Luke 7:16; 9:26–32; 13:17; 24:26; 19:37; John 1:14; 2:11; 17:5; 1 Corinthians 2:8. Adapted from Richard D. Patterson, "Psalm 45: A Song in 'G Major,'" Bible.org, accessed May 22, 2025.

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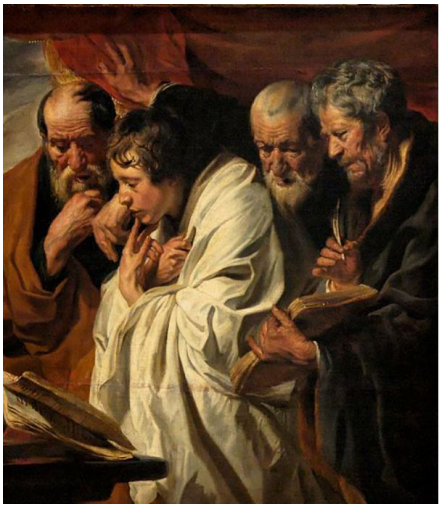
WHO IS THE APOSTLE JOHN?



Jordaens, *The Four Evangelists*, 1630

The Apostle John is considered the author of the Gospel of John; the epistles 1, 2, and 3 John; and the book of Revelation. From the Gospels, we know that the 12 disciples knew John as the friend of Jesus. He, Peter, and James witnessed Jesus' transfiguration and His agony in Gethsemane before Jesus went to the Cross. He alone among the disciples was present at the Crucifixion and was entrusted by Jesus with the care of His mother (essentially adopting him as a brother). John was also, after Mary Magdalene, the first of the 12 disciples to look into the tomb on Resurrection morning and was the first to recognize the risen Lord when He appeared to the disciples at the Galilean shore. He appears throughout as the beloved disciple, in closest friendship with the Lord.[1]

In his later years in Asia Minor, church leaders came to learn from the Apostle John and hear his eyewitness accounts about Jesus. He is unique for his connection to the early church fathers—he taught Polycarp (AD 69–155), and Polycarp discipled Irenaeus (AD 130–202), bishop of Lyons. Tradition says John held leadership over the seven key churches of Asia mentioned in the book of Revelation. Many scholars agree the Gospel of John was published from Ephesus between AD 80 and 100, though an earlier date is possible. Today visitors to Ephesus can see the ruins of a large Byzantine church built by Emperor Justinian (AD 483–565) that marks the traditional burial place of John.[2]

The main emphasis of the Gospel of John is belief in Jesus as the promised Messiah and Son of God for eternal life. John's gospel differs from the synoptic Gospels[3] in content and style, supplementing them with additional details. The synoptics emphasize Jesus' Galilean ministry, parables, and God's kingdom. John emphasizes Jesus' Judean ministry and omits the parables and much of the teaching about God's kingdom. It includes long discourses about eternal life and shows the length of Jesus' ministry. Except for parts of Matthew, John contains more lengthy teachings by Jesus than the synoptics, punctuated by questions and objections from the audiences. He includes fewer narrative details. Additionally, John paraphrases Jesus' words differently from the other gospel writers, possibly because he is preserving more formal aspects of Jesus' teaching—such as sermons in synagogues and disputes with Jewish theologians.[4] Second-century evidence suggests the church regarded the book of John to be strategically located as last among the Gospels because it could clarify, amplify, supplement, and provide a broader and deeper theological framework for the other Gospels.[5]

Apostle John's Tomb at the Basilica of St. John in Turkey, built by Emperor Justinian, AD 565

1. Adapted from Phillip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume 1* (Charleston: Nabu Press, 2010), 415–416.
2. Adapted from Gary M. Burge and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 269, 284, 532–533.
3. The synoptic Gospels are Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which offer parallel accounts of Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection.
4. Adapted from Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 258–259, 293.
5. S. A. Cummins, "Book of John," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 400.

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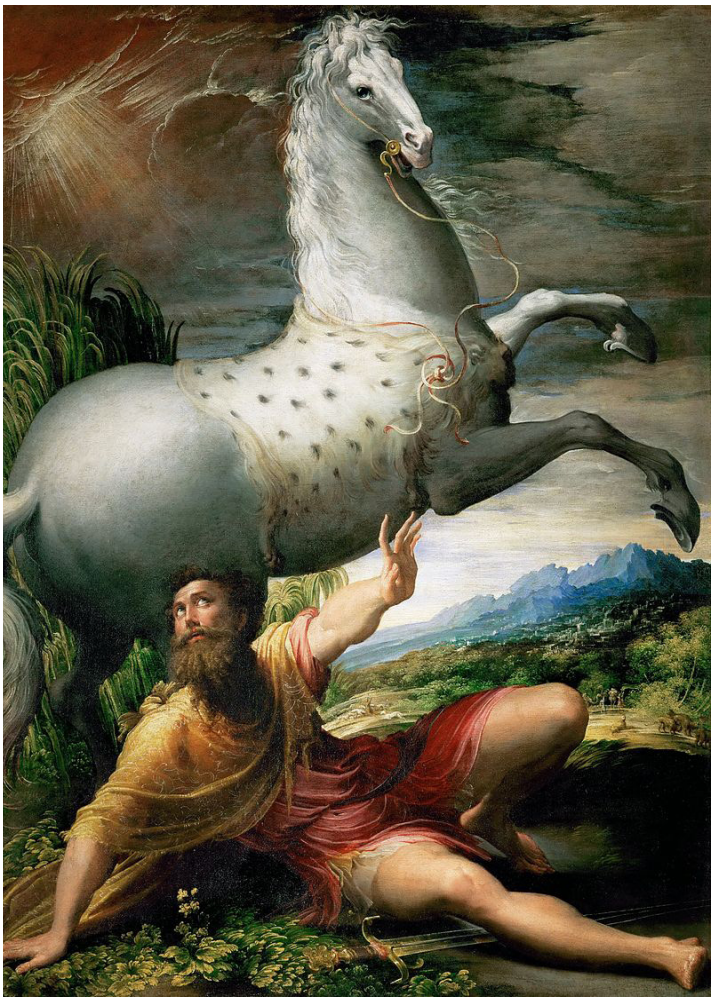
WHO WAS SAUL OF TARSUS?



Parmigianino, *The Conversion of St Paul*, 1528

In the days of the acts of the apostles, after Christ's ascension into heaven, Tarsus was "no obscure city" (Acts 21:39). The city lay in a central location, and its inhabitants were well known for learning not only philosophy but also "the whole round of education in general," especially rhetoric, the art of persuasive speaking and writing. After their initial education, the young scholars would then complete their studies abroad. Saul (also known as Paul) followed this pattern by studying in Jerusalem under the rabbi Gamaliel, who held a leading position in the Sanhedrin.[1] Paul's letters reflect his familiarity with ancient rhetoric. Although he received rigorous training in the Torah, he most likely also read Homer, Euripides, and other Greek literature (Acts 17:28; 1 Corinthians 15:33).[2]

Paul lived in a bilingual world—he was both a Jew and a Roman citizen, which was a great advantage on his missionary journeys. While many currently believe God changed his name from Saul to Paul at his conversion, the Bible never tells us this.[3] It was common for non-ethnic Roman citizens to have a Roman name as well as their given name. Among his Jewish friends and family, where Aramaic and Hebrew were spoken, he would have used his Jewish name, Saul. But as he moved into Greek-speaking areas on his missionary journeys, he would more commonly use the Roman name Paul (Gk. *Paulos*). Acts 13:9 tells us that Paul used both names.[4]

1. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Gamaliel I," Britannica, last modified July 20, 1998.
2. Adapted from Gary M. Burge and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 313.
3. Gary Manning Jr., "Paul's Name Change," The Good Book Blog - Biola University Blogs, last modified February 6, 2019.
4. Burge and Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity*, 314.

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THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF ISAIAH 40

Carracci, *Saint John the Baptist Bearing Witness*, c. 1600

Isaiah 40 is referenced in the New Testament in numerous locations. Matthew 3:3 says, "For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, *'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight."'*"[1] We learn from the New Testament that this is ultimately a prophecy about John the Baptist.

The Isaiah 40 theme of the coming Messiah likewise reverberates through the New Testament. Isaiah 40 announced the coming of the Lord to intervene and deliver the people from bondage. The people were to prepare for this, comfort others, and wait on the Lord. This was true right before they left Babylon to return to their own land. It was true on the eve of Christ's first coming and when John the Baptist came preaching repentance because the Messiah was coming.[2]

Further, Isaiah 40 begins with *"Comfort, comfort my people,"* and goes on to assure them of the Lord's presence, blessing, and care. The tone of John 14, which records Jesus' last conversation with His disciples before the Crucifixion, is also very much like that of Isaiah 40. Jesus said, *"[1]Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. . . .[14]If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. . . .[18]I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:1, 14, 18).*

1. Isaiah 40:3
2. Adapted from Allen Ross, "A Message of Comfort to God's People," Bible.org, accessed May 28, 2025

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AUDIENCE

WHO WAS NICODEMUS?

Note: This entry is also found in the "Infrastructure, Society, and Culture" section.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest ruling court of justice among the Jewish people in the time of Jesus. The Roman government allowed the Sanhedrin to judge over certain internal matters and was headed up by the high priest.

Nicodemus was wealthy, educated, respected, and powerful. In their conversation, Jesus described him as "the teacher of Israel," meaning he must have known much of the Old Testament law and tradition. However, Jesus told him that wasn't enough; he must be born again. No special title or keeping the law would get him into the kingdom of God; only spiritual rebirth could save him. As a learned scholar of the Old Testament, Nicodemus would have been familiar with Moses lifting the serpent in the wilderness. Just as the people in Numbers were cursed, unable to save themselves, and had to look at the bronze serpent to live, so are all people under sin's curse and must look to Christ for salvation and eternal life.[1]

La Farge, *Visit of Nicodemus to Christ,* 1880

The next time Nicodemus appeared in the Gospel of John, the Sanhedrin began to denounce Jesus as a false prophet. Nicodemus, however, showed some amount of sympathy toward Jesus by speaking up. *"Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" (John 7:51) (ESV).*

The last time Nicodemus is mentioned, he assisted in the burial of Jesus, contributing about 75 pounds of spices for wrapping the body. While Scripture says nothing more of Nicodemus, there is good reason to believe he became a follower of Jesus. He is an example of people who believed in Jesus because of His signs and miracles.[2] According to Christian tradition, he was persecuted by Jews, lost his status in the Sanhedrin, and had to leave Jerusalem because of his faith in Christ.[3]

1. Steven J. Cole, "Lesson 16: How Jesus Is Like a Snake (John 3:14–15; Numbers 21:4–9)," Bible.org, last modified June 16, 2013.
2. Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 270.
3. Adapted from Ronald F. Youngblood, *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary: New and Enhanced Edition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 807, 1022.

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AUDIENCE

GROWING IN HOLINESS

Note: This entry is also found in "The Church" section.

Tavella, *The Repentance of Mary Magdalene,* 18th century

Throughout John's letters, he talks about false teachers who claim they are "without sin" (1:8, 10), "have fellowship with God" even while they walk in darkness (1:6), "know God" but disobey Him (2:4), and are "in the light" but hate their fellow believers (2:9).

These false teachers believed they had no sin because they had embraced Gnosticism[1]—the belief that the body, or flesh, was separate from and less important than the spirit. Gnosticism devalues anything material, or physical, and therefore, minimizes what people do. The false teachers thought they could do whatever they wanted since God valued spiritual experiences "beyond the flesh." But by saying things in the flesh do not matter and denying their sinfulness, they felt they didn't need Christ's atoning death on the Cross.[2]

By writing "so that you may not sin," John knew we all still sin. However, while we will never attain sinless perfection in this life, believers can and do have victory over sin. Repeatedly, John reaffirms that "No one who is born of God practices sin" (3:9). Christians should not dismiss their sin, but rather strive to grow in holiness.

Our sins were so significant to God that His own Son came in the flesh and died on the Cross for them. If we understand this, we will not take advantage of His sacrifice by sinning more. Rather, as we dwell on God's amazing grace, we will recognize sin for what it is and strive to please our Savior.[3]

1. Gnostics were early Christian heretics (people rejecting Gospel truths) who thought anything material or physical was inherently evil. Some practiced asceticism, while others practiced libertinism, but both practices came from devaluing the body. Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament, 4th edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 261. Adapted from Bob Utley, "1 John 2:3–3:3" Bible.Org, last modified May 7, 2011.
2. Adapted from Gary M. Burge and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 539–540.
3. Adapted from Steven J. Cole, "Lesson 5: The Key to Holiness (1 John 2:1–2)," Bible.Org, last modified May 31, 2013.

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AUDIENCE

RESPONDING TO GOD'S CHARACTER

Rubens, *The Transfiguration of Christ,* 1605

Psalm 145:8 says, *"The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."* Praising God at all times is the proper response to Him. One theologian calls this verse "as clear and satisfactory a description of the nature of God . . . as can anywhere be found" and adds that it "invites us to seek after Him."[1] How does it do this? If God not only befriends us, but is sympathetic to our suffering and responds to us with lovingkindness, wouldn't we want to know Him? So if verse 8 is not our mental image of God, if we think of God as out to punish us for our sins, we do not have a biblical picture of God. He went to extreme costs to provide a way to forgive our sins on the Cross, demonstrating His righteousness and mercy.

In nearly every psalm, David or other psalmists are experiencing overwhelming trouble. And yet the psalms are filled with praises to God. Psalm 145 in particular played a special role in the Jewish liturgy. In Jewish practice, this psalm was recited twice in the morning and once in the evening service.[2]

Similarly, we can make praise a practice. The only way we will join in praising God daily, even in times of trial, is *if we resolve to do so.* We can do this in the following ways:

- focus on His glorious majesty and splendor
- take the time to be awed by His grace, love, goodness, and mercy
- rejoice in the majesty of His kingdom
- be touched by His kindness to the needy
- look to Him to meet our daily needs
- know God as both righteous and kind
- call upon the Lord in prayer[3]

1. Adapted from Steven J. Cole, "Psalm 145: God Fanatics," Bible.org, accessed May 22, 2025.
2. Adapted from Richard D. Patterson, "Psalm 45: A Song in 'G Major,'" Bible.org, accessed May 22, 2025.
3. Adapted from Cole, "Psalm 145: God Fanatics."

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AUDIENCE

THE THREAT OF ASSYRIA

Note: This entry is also found in the "Time and Place" section.

Rubens, *The Defeat of Sennacherib,* 1614

The book of Isaiah is set against the background of the second half of the eighth century BC, when the Neo-Assyrian Empire became a greater world power than any previously known in history.

We get a glimpse of Israel facing this superpower in chapters 7–12, when the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III invaded Israel. Ahaz, king of Judah, had summoned Assyria to police the region in response to threats from Aram and the northern kingdom of Israel. This gave Assyria a foothold, which led to Aram being conquered, its people getting deported, and all of Aram being incorporated into the Assyrian Empire (732 BC). Sections of the northern kingdom were also captured, and several years later, Israel rebelled again and was totally integrated into the Assyrian Empire.

Later, the invasion of Judah by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 brought the destruction of many of the fortified cities of Judah. Though God rescued Judah, this was a time of fear and political uncertainty as the Assyrians terrorized the ancient Near East. A country could choose to be Assyria's submissive vassal, paying annual tribute and supplying troops. But any sign of disloyalty would lead to the Assyrians reducing its territory and increasing Assyrian control. Their goal was the assimilation of foreign peoples into a massive empire. However, this was a big theological problem for the Israelites. They were a people chosen and set apart by God, living in a land God had promised and delivered to them. The Assyrian policy was a threat to the covenant distinctiveness of Israel.[1]

Into this context, Isaiah 40–48 begins with words of comfort to God's people: "Your God returns!" Isaiah 40 addresses most of Isaiah's major themes: God's powerful and transforming prophetic Word, the unrivaled sovereignty of God as Creator, the futility of idols and the gods they represent, the divine preparation and completion of their return from exile, and Jerusalem's comfort.[2]

1. Adapted from Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2009), 522–523.
2. Adapted from Richard L. Schultz, "Book of Isaiah," in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, and Daniel J. Treier, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 340.

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AUDIENCE

THE INCARNATION

John wrote his first letter in response to Christians who had started to deviate from a central belief of Christianity about Jesus Christ: the Incarnation. This is the event of Jesus, God's Son, coming into the world as a human being. While they believed in Jesus, they disagreed on how Jesus came to live among people in the world: as fully God and fully man.[1] The opponents in 1 John believed Jesus Christ was divine, God Himself. But they questioned Jesus as fully human. How could God himself, in His perfection, take on human flesh? They wanted to affirm the divinity of Jesus Christ, but weren't convinced that He truly took on human nature. They elevated Christ's divinity at the expense of His humanity.

Gottlieb, *Christ Teaching in Capernaum,* 1879

Their position made sense in a Hellenistic world that believed in many deities. However, this same culture rejected the idea that such divinities entered our material world, with its moral imperfections and decay. This stark hierarchy of valuing the "above" over the "below" and "spirituality" over the "evil body" comes from Gnosticism, one of the first theological hurdles the church faced. This error in thinking, if adopted, had serious implications for the gospel, Christians' foundational belief: how could Christ die for our sins—in our place—if He never had a body, was not fully human as we are?

Gnosticism separated Christ from our world and sequestered Him with the (supposedly real) deities in heaven. John challenged this teaching because he, along with Jesus' first followers, saw Christ, heard Him, and touched Him.[2]

1. This doctrine is called the *hypostatic union.*
2. Adapted from Gary M. Burge and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 538–539.

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AUDIENCE

ISAIAH: A MESSAGE OF HOPE AND COMFORT

Note: This entry is also found in the "Purpose" section.

The message of the book of Isaiah is arranged to highlight the hope and comfort Israel was given by the Lord, and the reasons they could trust Him.

Hacker, *By the Waters of Babylon,* 1888

In chapters 40–55, the first emphasis was to remind them that they could trust God. Exile did not come because God was unable to deliver them. Whether God delivered them (as He did in the destruction of Sennacherib's army) or not (as in the fall of Jerusalem), He had not forsaken them. His plan for their ultimate good was continuing.[1] Secondly, the people of Isaiah's time needed to be reassured that God would not fail to carry out his promises. After the consequences, God would bring restoration and reconciliation. This confidence and hope provided a new perspective.[2]

In chapter 40, verse 27 rebukes the people for their wrong conclusion that God had written them off. Isaiah affirms that God is the Creator and Preserver of all things. He will not forsake what He has made. When Isaiah says He does not become weary or tired, he is referring to a Hebrew idiom, which means "He does not lose patience." It is a word play that contrasts with the human tiredness and weariness described in verses 28–31.[3] Not only is God attentive, but no problems are hidden from or too overwhelming for Him. God is incomprehensible. His ways are right, even though we do not know them. He knows all about us—our ways are not hidden from Him. Isaiah 40 is a message of comfort, based on God's omnipotence and incomparable nature. Consequently, the people who know Him are instructed not to doubt Him but to renew their faith as they wait for His promises.[4]

1. Recall from the judges' cycle that God's judgments were intended to turn the hearts of His unfaithful people back to Him.
2. Adapted from Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2009), 526–528.
3. Bob Utley, "Isaiah 40," Bible.org, accessed May 28, 2025.
4. Adapted from Allen Ross, "A Message of Comfort to God's People," Bible.org, accessed May 28, 2025.

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NERO'S PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

Note: This entry is also found in the "Church" section.

Nero (AD 37-68) was the Roman emperor from AD 54–68, and until AD 59, Nero's biographers cite only acts of generosity and mercy by the ruler. He had his mother put to death in AD 59 and increasingly lost popularity with the people. He murdered his wife Octavia in AD 62 so that he could marry her successor, Poppea.

In AD 64 a fire—possibly lit at his orders—destroyed much of Rome.[1] Tacitus, the great Roman historian, records the details of the fire that destroyed ten of Rome's fourteen districts in a six-day period. He blames Nero for the fire and says Nero needed a scapegoat to deflect the suspicion that the blaze was set by imperial order. Tacitus writes,

> Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men whom the crowd styled Christians. . . . First, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, vast numbers were convicted. They were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed, were burned to serve as lamps by night. (15.44).

Nero launched a persecution against the Christians, martyring Peter during this assault. Eusebius, the early church historian, said the apostle Paul also suffered martyrdom under Nero when he returned to the city later.[2] One first-century oil lamp from Asia Province depicts a man, condemned to death by wild beasts, or "*ad bestias*," being attacked by two lions. In the Roman Empire, a *bestiarius* referred to a person assigned to execution in the arena by wild animals, typically hungry and angry lions or bears. When a person was condemned to death in this way, they were forced into the arena unarmed and often chained. During times of persecution, many Christians in the Roman Empire were sentenced to death by beasts as a spectacle in the arenas, probably beginning as early as the reign of the emperor Claudius, Nero's predecessor.

During his two-plus years of ministry in Ephesus, it is possible that Paul was condemned to battle wild animals in the arena. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul stated that he "fought with beasts at Ephesus" (1 Corinthians 15:32). In 2 Corinthians 1:8, Paul wrote that in Asia Province he and the brethren despaired of life, but God delivered them from death. Several ancient church scholars considered the Corinthians passage to be referring to an actual battle with beasts, and early non-canonical church literature also records that Paul fought with beasts—specifically a lion—in the stadium at Ephesus.[3]

1. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Nero," Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified June 5, 2022.
2. Gary M. Burge and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 318–319.
3. Adapted from Titus Kennedy, *Unearthing the Bible: 101 Archaeological Discoveries that Bring the Bible to Life* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2020), 226–227.

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Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest ruling court of justice among the Jewish people in the time of Jesus. The Roman government allowed the Sanhedrin to judge over certain internal matters and was headed up by the high priest.

Nicodemus was wealthy, educated, respected, and powerful. In their conversation, Jesus described him as "the teacher of Israel," meaning he must have known much of the Old Testament law and tradition. However, Jesus told him that wasn't enough; he must be born again. No special title or keeping the law would get him into the kingdom of God; only spiritual rebirth could save him. As a learned scholar of the Old Testament, Nicodemus would have been familiar with Moses lifting the serpent in the wilderness. Just as the people in Numbers were cursed, unable to save themselves, and had to look at the bronze serpent to live, so are all people under sin's curse and must look to Christ for salvation and eternal life.[1]

La Farge, *Visit of Nicodemus to Christ,* 1880

The next time Nicodemus appeared in the Gospel of John, the Sanhedrin began to denounce Jesus as a false prophet. Nicodemus, however, showed some amount of sympathy toward Jesus by speaking up. *"Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" (John 7:51) (ESV).*

The last time Nicodemus is mentioned, he assisted in the burial of Jesus, contributing about 75 pounds of spices for wrapping the body. While Scripture says nothing more of Nicodemus, there is good reason to believe he became a follower of Jesus. He is an example of people who believed in Jesus because of His signs and miracles.[2] According to Christian tradition, he was persecuted by Jews, lost his status in the Sanhedrin, and had to leave Jerusalem because of his faith in Christ.[3]

1. Steven J. Cole, "Lesson 16: How Jesus Is Like a Snake (John 3:14–15; Numbers 21:4–9)," Bible.org, last modified June 16, 2013.
2. Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 270.
3. Adapted from Ronald F. Youngblood, *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary: New and Enhanced Edition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 807, 1022.

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THE BLESSED PERSON: BIBLICAL HAPPINESS

"Blessed" is plural in the Hebrew text of Psalm 1 and emphasizes the happiness of those who are constantly attentive to God and His instruction. The Hebrew word for "blessing" comes from a word meaning "to go straight, advance, set right." The root verb means: (a) to "advance in the way of understanding" (Prov. 9:6b), (b) to "avoid the way of evil men" (Prov. 4:14), and in Isaiah 1:17 it speaks of correcting false rulers so they will go straight by learning and following Scripture.

Psalm 1 is not an unconditional promise of a life without problems. It's conditional nature is highly stressed. "How blessed is *the* man *who*. . ." describes a man walking in an obedient and trusting relationship with God. The passage is not about complying with a special formula to experience happiness. Instead, it describes the blessing for those whose lives are marked by certain qualities as a result of faith and relationship with God. Certain things corrupt and destroy. Others give the capacity and means for happiness through trust and fellowship with God. This is the message of Psalm 1.[1]

This wisdom Psalm shows that the way to happiness is through a life well lived according to the guidelines given by the Lord. However, the way to destruction is to lead a life that disregards God's teachings. Philosopher Mortimer J. Adler observes that "people generally espouse the mistake . . . that happiness is a psychological state rather than . . . the quality of a morally good life." The psalmist says that a person who wants to be blessed must live wisely in his relationship with the Lord, delighting in and obeying His law.

"Blessed" or "blessed is the man" is a pronouncement found several times in the Psalms and in Proverbs. This is the kind of blessing one experiences as he lives righteously in the context of his relationship with God. The individual is happy, not as the result of feeling a certain emotion, but because they have lived life well—that is, according to biblical truth.[2]

1. Adapted from J. Hampton Keathley, III, "Psalm 1: Two Ways of Life—A Psalm of Wisdom," Bible.org, last modified July 1, 2004.
2. It is probable the psalmist refers to "any and all instruction given by God to benefit men by guiding him in the proper course of life." Adapted from Greg Herrick, "Psalm 1: Two Ways of Life," Bible.org, last modified July 1, 2004.

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CHRIST, OUR ADVOCATE

Signorelli, ***The Resurrected Christ Appearing to His Disciples,*** **1514**

John describes Christ as our Advocate. The Greek word for "advocate" refers to one who is called alongside to help, especially in a court of law. In this context, Jesus Christ is our defense attorney. He is our Advocate in heaven, "with the Father." Whenever we sin, Satan, the accuser, charges us as guilty before God. Jesus does not say we are not guilty, because this would not be true. Instead, He pardons us because He paid the penalty for that sin by His death in our place.

Although Christians should confess their sins (1:9), our confession is not what brings us forgiveness. John says, "If anyone sins, we have an advocate." Our forgiveness and our standing with God do not depend on anything we do, but rather on the finished work of Christ. He is there before the Father, pleading on our behalf, even before we repent! Hebrews 7:25 says: "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." Thanks to His perpetual advocacy, we who are in Christ do not need to live in fear of conviction. While we are guilty, the penalty has already been paid by Christ, who is not only our Substitute but also our Advocate, who pleads our case for us!

He does this with the Father, who is not a hostile, begrudging Judge to be won over. Instead, He is the loving Father who sent His own Son to pay the penalty we deserved! God is both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). God's righteous demand for justice was fully satisfied by the death of His Son. If we have trusted in Him, our sins are paid in full![1]

1. Because the Father and Son are one, God is both the judge and the one paying the penalty. Jesus voluntarily participated in this plan. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 746. Adapted from Steven J. Cole, "Lesson 5: The Key to Holiness (1 John 2:1–2)," Bible.Org, last modified May 31, 2013.

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TIME AND PLACE

THE THREAT OF ASSYRIA

Note: This entry is also found in the "Audience" section.

Rubens, *The Defeat of Sennacherib,* 1614

The book of Isaiah is set against the background of the second half of the eighth century BC, when the Neo-Assyrian Empire became a greater world power than any previously known in history.

We get a glimpse of Israel facing this superpower in chapters 7–12, when the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III invaded Israel. Ahaz, king of Judah, had summoned Assyria to police the region in response to threats from Aram and the northern kingdom of Israel. This gave Assyria a foothold, which led to Aram being conquered, its people getting deported, and all of Aram being incorporated into the Assyrian Empire (732 BC). Sections of the northern kingdom were also captured, and several years later, Israel rebelled again and was totally integrated into the Assyrian Empire.

Later, the invasion of Judah by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 brought the destruction of many of the fortified cities of Judah. Though God rescued Judah, this was a time of fear and political uncertainty as the Assyrians terrorized the ancient Near East. A country could choose to be Assyria's submissive vassal, paying annual tribute and supplying troops. But any sign of disloyalty would lead to the Assyrians reducing its territory and increasing Assyrian control. Their goal was the assimilation of foreign peoples into a massive empire. However, this was a big theological problem for the Israelites. They were a people chosen and set apart by God, living in a land God had promised and delivered to them. The Assyrian policy was a threat to the covenant distinctiveness of Israel.[1]

Into this context, Isaiah 40–48 begins with words of comfort to God's people: "Your God returns!" Isaiah 40 addresses most of Isaiah's major themes: God's powerful and transforming prophetic Word, the unrivaled sovereignty of God as Creator, the futility of idols and the gods they represent, the divine preparation and completion of their return from exile, and Jerusalem's comfort.[2]

1. Adapted from Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2009), 522–523.
2. Adapted from Richard L. Schultz, "Book of Isaiah," in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, and Daniel J. Treier, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 340.

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NERO'S PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

Note: This entry is also found in the "Infrastructure, Society, and Culture" section.

Nero (AD 37-68) was the Roman emperor from AD 54–68, and until AD 59, Nero's biographers cite only acts of generosity and mercy by the ruler. He had his mother put to death in AD 59 and increasingly lost popularity with the people. He murdered his wife Octavia in AD 62 so that he could marry her successor, Poppea.

In AD 64 a fire—possibly lit at his orders—destroyed much of Rome.[1] Tacitus, the great Roman historian, records the details of the fire that destroyed ten of Rome's fourteen districts in a six-day period. He blames Nero for the fire and says Nero needed a scapegoat to deflect the suspicion that the blaze was set by imperial order. Tacitus writes,

> Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men whom the crowd styled Christians. . . . First, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, vast numbers were convicted. They were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed, were burned to serve as lamps by night. (15.44).

Nero launched a persecution against the Christians, martyring Peter during this assault. Eusebius, the early church historian, said the apostle Paul also suffered martyrdom under Nero when he returned to the city later.[2] One first-century oil lamp from Asia Province depicts a man, condemned to death by wild beasts, or "*ad bestias*," being attacked by two lions. In the Roman Empire, a *bestiarius* referred to a person assigned to execution in the arena by wild animals, typically hungry and angry lions or bears. When a person was condemned to death in this way, they were forced into the arena unarmed and often chained. During times of persecution, many Christians in the Roman Empire were sentenced to death by beasts as a spectacle in the arenas, probably beginning as early as the reign of the emperor Claudius, Nero's predecessor.

During his two-plus years of ministry in Ephesus, it is possible that Paul was condemned to battle wild animals in the arena. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul stated that he "fought with beasts at Ephesus" (1 Corinthians 15:32). In 2 Corinthians 1:8, Paul wrote that in Asia Province he and the brethren despaired of life, but God delivered them from death. Several ancient church scholars considered the Corinthians passage to be referring to an actual battle with beasts, and early non-canonical church literature also records that Paul fought with beasts—specifically a lion—in the stadium at Ephesus.[3]

1. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Nero," Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified June 5, 2022.
2. Gary M. Burge and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 318–319.
3. Adapted from Titus Kennedy, *Unearthing the Bible: 101 Archaeological Discoveries that Bring the Bible to Life* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2020), 226–227.

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GROWING IN HOLINESS

Note: This entry is also found in the "Audience" section.

Tavella, *The Repentance of Mary Magdalene,* 18th century

Throughout John's letters, he talks about false teachers who claim they are "without sin" (1:8, 10), "have fellowship with God" even while they walk in darkness (1:6), "know God" but disobey Him (2:4), and are "in the light" but hate their fellow believers (2:9).

These false teachers believed they had no sin because they had embraced Gnosticism[1]—the belief that the body, or flesh, was separate from and less important than the spirit. Gnosticism devalues anything material, or physical, and therefore, minimizes what people do. The false teachers thought they could do whatever they wanted since God valued spiritual experiences "beyond the flesh." But by saying things in the flesh do not matter and denying their sinfulness, they felt they didn't need Christ's atoning death on the Cross.[2]

By writing "so that you may not sin," John knew we all still sin. However, while we will never attain sinless perfection in this life, believers can and do have victory over sin. Repeatedly, John reaffirms that "No one who is born of God practices sin" (3:9). Christians should not dismiss their sin, but rather strive to grow in holiness.

Our sins were so significant to God that His own Son came in the flesh and died on the Cross for them. If we understand this, we will not take advantage of His sacrifice by sinning more. Rather, as we dwell on God's amazing grace, we will recognize sin for what it is and strive to please our Savior.[3]

1. Gnostics were early Christian heretics (people rejecting Gospel truths) who thought anything material or physical was inherently evil. Some practiced asceticism, while others practiced libertinism, but both practices came from devaluing the body. Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament, 4th edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 261. Adapted from Bob Utley, "1 John 2:3–3:3" Bible.Org, last modified May 7, 2011.
2. Adapted from Gary M. Burge and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 539–540.
3. Adapted from Steven J. Cole, "Lesson 5: The Key to Holiness (1 John 2:1–2)," Bible.Org, last modified May 31, 2013.

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THE BOOK OF PROVERBS: FOUNDATIONAL WISDOM

The book of Proverbs is the foundational wisdom book of the Bible, teaching the ABCs of wisdom and introducing more complex issues that are further elaborated in Ecclesiastes, Job, and the wisdom teachings of the New Testament. For Israel, every aspect of knowledge and wisdom was irreversibly tied to God. Wisdom concerns the relation of all of creation to God, in every aspect of God's created order, and the implications of a life of wisdom versus not heeding its guidance.[1] The book of Proverbs is a primer on morality for young people. It looks at how everything will turn out in the end. We see in Proverbs 24:16 an example: *"For the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity."* Seven times refers to an often biblically cited divine number of perfection, so this means that while the righteous falls, he will stand up again. But the wicked does not.[2]

The purpose of the book can be summarized as guidance for life: knowing wisdom and instruction and learning the fear of the Lord.[3]

Solomon is the principal author of the book of Proverbs. Scholars think Proverbs 1–9 combine Solomon's sayings with later wisdom teachings from unnamed Hebrew sages. These sages, or wise men, were associated with the royal court. Along with priests, prophets, and kings, they formed the four basic leadership classes of Israelite society. They compiled Hebrew and foreign wisdom literature and taught the people—especially the next generation of Israel's leaders—knowledge.[4]

The first nine chapters of Proverbs are written as lectures addressed by a "father" (teacher) to a "son" (student) who is on the verge of adult responsibilities. Rather than focusing on the complexities of life as later chapters do, these chapters show life in a structured world of boundaries. This world reveals a fundamental good and bad, shown by two opposing paths.[5]

At the end of the book, a noble wife with children speaks faithful instruction. The mother's learned instruction indicates that daughters are obviously involved in the educational process as well. Both sons and daughters must learn wisdom.

1. Adapted from Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 442–443, and from Van Leeuwen in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, and Daniel J. Treier, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Ada: Baker Academic, 2005), 638.
2. Adapted from Bruce K Waltke, *"Lesson 8: Does Proverbs Promise Too Much? (3:1–12),"* Biblicaltraining.org, accessed February 25, 2025.
3. Adapted from Hill/Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 441.
4. Adapted from Hill/Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 442–443.
5. Adapted from Van Leeuwen in Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 640.

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PURPOSE

THE APOSTLE JOHN'S GOSPEL AND PURPOSE

Perhaps more than any other book in the Bible, the Gospel of John clearly states its purpose:

> *"[30]Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [31]but these are written* ***so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,*** *and* ***that by believing you may have life in his name****" (John 20:30–31) (ESV)* (emphasis added).

di Buoninsegna, *The Healing of a Blind Man*, 1319

In other words, John wrote his gospel to help people come to a saving faith in Christ. During the time John wrote this book, a widespread heresy called Gnosticism was infecting churches. Gnostics believed that anything material, or physical, was inherently evil. Therefore, the fact that Jesus, God Himself, came to earth in bodily (physical) form was problematic for them since that would mean God is evil. So Gnostics denied that God had come to earth in physical form. This is why John focused so heavily on both the deity of Jesus (being God) and His humanity—*"the Word became flesh."* (Jesus grew tired and thirsty, wept, and physically died and rose again.)

John made Jesus' identity clear by recording Jesus' claims to deity—"I am. . ." *("I am the bread of life;" "I am the resurrection and the life;" "I am the way, the truth, and the life;"* and so on.) John also referenced Jesus' "I am" claims that were not followed by a descriptor, which were overt references to God's pronouncement in the Old Testament: "I AM-YAHWEH." By saying "I am," Jesus was claiming to be God.[1]

Brion, *Jesus and Peter on the Water*, 1863

However, Jesus did not only come to reveal Himself as God. He also brought hope for the world. Therefore, John's message is also one of sacrifice and redemption. Those who believe Christ is God who came in the flesh to die for our sins and believe in Him for salvation will gain eternal life.[2]

1. Compare Exodus 3:14 and John 8:58. Adapted from Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 260–261.
2. Adapted from Gary M. Burge and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 274–275.

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PURPOSE

ISAIAH: A MESSAGE OF HOPE AND COMFORT

Note: This entry is also found in the "Audience" section.

The message of the book of Isaiah is arranged to highlight the hope and comfort Israel was given by the Lord, and the reasons they could trust Him.

Hacker, *By the Waters of Babylon,* 1888

In chapters 40–55, the first emphasis was to remind them that they could trust God. Exile did not come because God was unable to deliver them. Whether God delivered them (as He did in the destruction of Sennacherib's army) or not (as in the fall of Jerusalem), He had not forsaken them. His plan for their ultimate good was continuing.[1] Secondly, the people of Isaiah's time needed to be reassured that God would not fail to carry out his promises. After the consequences, God would bring restoration and reconciliation. This confidence and hope provided a new perspective.[2]

In chapter 40, verse 27 rebukes the people for their wrong conclusion that God had written them off. Isaiah affirms that God is the Creator and Preserver of all things. He will not forsake what He has made. When Isaiah says He does not become weary or tired, he is referring to a Hebrew idiom, which means "He does not lose patience." It is a word play that contrasts with the human tiredness and weariness described in verses 28–31.[3] Not only is God attentive, but no problems are hidden from or too overwhelming for Him. God is incomprehensible. His ways are right, even though we do not know them. He knows all about us—our ways are not hidden from Him. Isaiah 40 is a message of comfort, based on God's omnipotence and incomparable nature. Consequently, the people who know Him are instructed not to doubt Him but to renew their faith as they wait for His promises.[4]

1. Recall from the judges' cycle that God's judgments were intended to turn the hearts of His unfaithful people back to Him.
2. Adapted from Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2009), 526–528.
3. Bob Utley, "Isaiah 40," Bible.org, accessed May 28, 2025.
4. Adapted from Allen Ross, "A Message of Comfort to God's People," Bible.org, accessed May 28, 2025.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Creation Subject to Futility

God loves all of His creation. He intended for us to use creation for our own needs and to govern it for its good. Although sin disturbed the universe God created, the world was good when it was created.[1] In Romans 8:19, the apostle Paul says all creation waits for the day when Jesus returns and is revealed to the world to be the Son of God. Now, between the bookends of the Fall and Restoration, the effects of sin impair humanity and creation. Just as humanity experienced the Fall, so creation as a whole cannot reach the full purpose for which it was made.

The doctrine of a cosmic Fall spans Genesis 3 (where the ground is cursed because of man's rebellion) to Revelation 22 (where the curse is finally removed). Man is part of nature, and the whole of nature was created good, but has been impaired by sin, and will—like the followers of Jesus—ultimately be freed from the effects of the Fall. Man was put in charge of creation, and when he fell, it too suffered brokenness.

Through the redemptive work of Jesus, the effects of the Fall are broken not only for man himself but for the creation which is dependent on him. If even now, man can seriously damage nature or be a good steward of it, what will the effects of a completely redeemed humanity be on the creation entrusted to its care? The Christian does not consider this world the best possible existence or disregard it as unimportant; it is God's creation, and He is glorified by all His works. At the time when Jesus returns and completely frees His followers from the effects of sin, the rest of His creation will also be freed from its frustration and bondage under the fall.[2]

1. Adapted from Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 356.
2. Adapted from F. F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Volume 6: Romans* (Downer's Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 170.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

ACKNOWLEDGE GOD

"In all your ways acknowledge him." What does that mean? It means that we recognize God as God, and acknowledge His authority in what we are doing. We expect God to direct us, and anticipate that He will move in our lives as He guides us. We must recognize Him for who He is.[1] This is done without reservation. It involves every aspect of our lives, in quality and quantity, as we depend upon Him.[2] Discipleship means learning to live in the presence of God—and it takes time and training to learn this, to make it a mental habit. We will always be learning how, but increasingly, we will grow to acknowledge Him in all of our ways. We will grow to do everything we do in word or deed on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ.[3]

Brueghel the Younger, *Christ Appears to Mary Magdalene*, 1630

Some people think this means that Christians are not to think because they will be relying on their own understanding. Not at all! What Solomon means is that we are not to rely purely on our human, fleshly understanding of how to live life, as if God didn't exist. Our flesh may say, "You deserve this or that," "You have rights," "Demand what's yours," "It's o.k. to cheat." No, we are not to rely on that kind of understanding but rather on the commands and wisdom of God.[4] It's true that God sometimes tells us what to do, but we are not simply in a relationship of master and slave. We are not driven to servanthood but drawn into it by a loving God. We, like Paul, move into complete service as free people under Someone who respects our wants and wills and helps us become the persons, in Christ, we want to be.[5] We know that Christ became a servant and died for us (Mark 10:45), so we too are to give our lives (wisely) for others. Acknowledging God in all our ways is the opposite of relying on our own understanding; it involves obeying God in all areas of our lives."[6]

As we acknowledge Him in all our ways, we will grow increasingly convinced of His good ways and align our will with His. Our desires will become His desires.

1. Adapted from Dallas Willard, "Knowing How to Acknowledge God," Dallas Willard Ministries, accessed February 26, 2025.
2. Adapted from Bruce K. Waltke, *"Lesson 8: Does Proverbs Promise Too Much? (3:1–12),"* Biblicaltraining.org, accessed February 25, 2025.
3. Adapted from Willard, "Knowing How to Acknowledge God."
4. Adapted from Greg Herrick, "Meditating on Scriptural Assurances," Bible.org, accessed February 24, 2025.
5. Adapted from Dallas Willard, *Hearing God*, (InterVarsity Press, 1984), 73–74.
6. Adapted from Herrick, "Meditating on Scriptural Assurances," Bible.org.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

MAKING YOUR PATHS STRAIGHT

In Proverbs 3:5–6, the focus is on trusting God, and the promise is that He will *"make straight your paths."* If we take *"make straight your paths"* to mean that we will never have difficulty, then our interpretation is incorrect. But if we understand *"he will make straight your paths"* to mean that He will show us His way of life, then this proverb is absolute. God will always do this for people who trust completely in Him.[1]

When believers undertake all our activities, we are not doing them on our own, but we are doing them in the confidence, vision, expectation, and character of Christ. We do them in expectation that God will act with us. The amazing news about the kingdom of God is that God invites us to co-labor with Him. As we do this, our fear and anxieties disappear because we are united with the God of the universe in His work.[2]

In themselves, the short *epigrams* (terse, sage, witty, and often paradoxical sayings) of truth in Proverbs don't express the entire message of God's way of a blessed life. We must put the truths together. For example, Proverbs 3:9–10 says, *"[9]Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; [10]then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine."* This is contrasted with 17:1: *"Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife."* Proverbs' short sayings present reality but don't give the entire picture. We will want to consider the statements about prosperity in Proverbs 3:9–10 in light of passages such as Proverbs 17:1 and the whole book of Proverbs, indeed, in light of the entire Bible. Then we will understand that God's blessed way of life promised in Proverbs 3 includes both fellowship with God now—seeing His action within us as we work and play—and the promise of future eternal blessings that outlast death.[3]

1. Adapted from Greg Herrick, "Meditating on Scriptural Assurances," Bible.org, accessed February 24, 2025.
2. Adapted from Dallas Willard, "Knowing How to Acknowledge God," Dallas Willard Ministries, accessed February 26, 2025.
3. Adapted from Bruce K Waltke, *"Lesson 8: Does Proverbs Promise Too Much? (3:1–12),"* Biblicaltraining.org, accessed February 25, 2025.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

WHAT DO THE TITLES "SON OF MAN" AND "SON OF GOD" MEAN?

"The Son of Man" was Jesus' favorite self-description. The Gospels associate the title with the whole scope of Christ's work: His earthly service, suffering and death, and exaltation in heaven.[1] Jesus calls Himself "the Son of Man" 84 times in the Gospels. In Matthew 26:64–66, when Jesus said of Himself, *"From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven,"* the high priest and the council immediately accused Him of blasphemy. They had recognized Jesus' reference to Daniel 7:13–14, which prophetically describes someone from heaven coming to rule forever over the whole world.[2] Several times in the Gospels, Jesus identifies Himself as this future judge who comes from heaven, receiving an everlasting, universal, indestructible kingdom.[3]

Titian, *Transfiguration*, 1560

We first see Jesus given the title "Son of God" when the angel Gabriel told Mary she would give birth to the Son of God. Later, at His baptism, God the Father announced Him to be His "beloved Son" in a voice from heaven.[4] In John's gospel, Jesus is the heavenly, eternal Son who is equal to God and reveals the Father. As the eternal Son of the Trinity, He is God; therefore, we can trust Him for eternal life. He is the One who has all authority from the Father to give life, pronounce eternal judgment, and rule over all. The title "Son of God" affirms Jesus' deity, making Him equal to God the Father in all His attributes.[5]

The "lifting up" in this passage refers to Jesus' coming Crucifixion. Just as looking at the bronze serpent brought deliverance to Israelites from venomous snakes in the wilderness, the Son of Man would be "lifted up" to deliver people from sin. The Israelites had to look in faith at the bronze serpent to be saved from death, and we must look in faith at the crucified Christ to have eternal life.[6] The Father's act of lifting Jesus up on the Cross testified to God's love for the world.[7] In the later chapters of his gospel, John describes Jesus' movement toward His "glorification" on the Cross: His arrest, trial, Crucifixion, and burial. "This is no tragedy, but rather a further opportunity to unveil Jesus's true mission from God. With unexpected irony, *John views the Cross as Jesus's royal coronation, as a place of glory from which new life will flow to everyone who believes."*[8]

1. Adapted from Daniel J. Treier, "Doctrine of Jesus Christ" in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 364.
2. Adapted from Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 682.
3. See Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69. Adapted from Stephen R. Spencer, "Doctrine of Last Things" in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 439.
4. See Luke 1:35, Matthew 3:17. Adapted from Ronald F. Youngblood, *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary: New and Enhanced Edition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 599–600.
5. See John 1:14; 8:19, John 20:31, John 5:20–22. Adapted from Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 682–683.
6. Adapted from Youngblood, *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 205.
7. Adapted from Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 270.
8. Gary M. Burge and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 269, emphasis added.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND OUR FIRSTFRUITS

Living life in the Spirit is mentioned 19 times in Romans 8. But what does it mean?

In Romans, Paul tells us there are two options for how we live our life: to live in the flesh (a life controlled by sin) or to live in the Spirit (a life controlled by God and His Word). Living by the Spirit frees us—not to do whatever we want but to live as we were designed.[1]

Once we trust in Christ as our Savior, we become a new creation, and the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of us (indwells us).[2] This is what Paul calls our "firstfruits," a "down payment" of the eternal heritage of glory that awaits believers (Romans 8:23). Having this taste of glory, we groan for more, longing to be free from the many habits and consequences of our old way of life. We will still be tempted, but because we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us, we no longer rely on our own efforts to overcome temptation and sinful habits. As we walk in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit works in us, transforming us from the inside out by changing our desires. Our tendency to sin will decrease, and our desire for things of God will grow. Because we are human, while on earth, we will never be perfectly holy like God. However, we will be fully sanctified someday when we are joined with Christ, becoming like Him.[3]

The Holy Spirit is constantly at work in our hearts: He convicts us of sin, prays for us, assures us of our salvation, and empowers us to live a godly life.[4] Despite our suffering and feelings of futility, God promises both our own redemption and that of the entire earth in the future.[5] With the Holy Spirit dwelling in us as our firstfruits, we can live confidently, knowing we are free from the rule of sin because of our position in Christ. With the power of the Holy Spirit, we can become more like Christ.[6]

1. Gary M. Burge and Gene L. Greene, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 416.
2. See John 7:37-39 and 1 John 4:12-14.
3. F. F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Romans* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 169–170.
4. Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 386.
5. Burge and Greene, *The New Testament in Antiquity*, 416.
6. Bruce, *Romans*, 173.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

ASKING FOR WISDOM

Wisdom plays a central role in Proverbs, and James seems to have been influenced by this book in both style and content. We can see this by noting the short, practical sayings and instructions. While wisdom involves both knowledge and practice, in these books, wisdom is, above all, a practically-oriented virtue that gives the godly person direction for how to live. Wisdom gives us insight into God's will and the way it is to be applied in our own life.[1]

Tanner, *The Thankful Poor*, 1894

The Bible often speaks of how wisdom produces a mature, godly character in the person who possesses it. According to Proverbs 8:35, the one who finds wisdom *"finds life and obtains favor from the Lord."* In light of this teaching, it may be that James introduces the subject of wisdom in verse 5 because he regards it as having the power to make the believer *"perfect and complete"* (v. 4b).[2]

God's desire to give wisdom is unlimited: *"if any of you lacks wisdom . . . ask," "gives generously to all," "without reproach," "it will be given."* This is a universal promise to all those who follow Christ.[3] But there are conditions. The phrase *"let him ask God"* is a present active imperative, which literally means "let him continue to ask of God." This is no one-time request but a persistent, repeated asking. Further, God does not just grant any request, however foolishly (as James makes clear in 4:1–3). But God grants the request made *"in faith, with no doubting."* "Faith" means more than a belief that God will give what we ask; it also includes confident, unwavering trust in God.[4]

1. Proverbs 2:10–19; 3:13–14; 9:1–6
2. Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James: Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 62.
3. Bob Utley, "James 1," Bible.org, accessed November 8, 2024.
4. Moo, *The Letter of James: Introduction and Commentary*, 64.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

BIBLICAL MEDITATION

Psalm 1 says the blessed man meditates on God's law day and night. "Day and night" is a Hebrew expression that means constantly, consistently, and regularly. In other words, God's Word is on his mind and in his heart at all times, in every situation.[1] The Hebrew phrase "he meditates" literally means to moan, growl, utter, speak, muse, think, and plan. Meditating involves thinking about what Scripture means and how, when, and where it should be applied. It includes steps of reading, hearing, studying, and memorizing.[2]

Though meditation may seem similar to Bible study, it differs in technique. In Bible study, you dissect the text; in Scripture meditation, you savor it. In study, you ask questions about the text; in meditation, you let the text ask questions of you. In study, you examine how biblical facts relate to each other; in meditation, you let God speak to you in light of the facts you've already considered. Biblical meditation is about absorbing scriptural truth: considering in your mind who God is and how He acts and being open to His leading to follow in His ways. Bible study before meditating is important preparatory work because it asks, "What did the passage say to its audience at that time?" This helps us interpret the text accurately.

Christians do not meditate the same way that practitioners of Eastern religions do. The goals are different. In Eastern religions, participants empty their minds and fill them with nothing. In Christianity, we aim to surrender our hurried lives, our worry, and our obsession with what others think of us and focus instead upon the words, concepts, and principles of Scripture.[3]

A good example of meditation can be seen in Joshua 1:8. God instructed Joshua to meditate (the same Hebrew word used in Psalm 1) on the book of the Law so that he could succeed in obeying God. This is the same point the psalmist makes: think on God's words, understand them, remember them, and live by them. Meditation is to be done day and night—it is never to cease.[4]

1. Adapted from Greg Herrick, "Psalm 1: Two Ways of Life," Bible.org, last modified July 1, 2004.
2. Adapted from J. Hampton Keathley, III, "Psalm 1: Two Ways of Life—A Psalm of Wisdom," Bible.org, last modified July 1, 2004.
3. Adapted from Jan Johnson, "Meditation: Not So Mysterious," Bible.org, last modified May 28, 2011.
4. Adapted from Herrick, "Psalm 1: Two Ways of Life."

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

ABIDING IN CHRIST

Tissot, *The Lord's Prayer,* 1896

The term "abide" appears in many New Testament passages.[1] Studying them shows that the Bible emphasizes our need for discipleship, not merely an initial decision to follow Christ.[2]

Jesus Christ was an example of abiding in God the Father. Throughout His ministry on earth, Jesus told people that He does not act on His own, but aligns His will with the will of the Father (i.e., John 5:19,30; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10,24). His intimate fellowship with the Father is a model of the relationship between Jesus and His followers.

The Greek word for "abiding" (menō) means "remaining" or "continuing."[3] At the Last Supper, Jesus used the example of a vine with branches to demonstrate how we abide in Him. The branches that abide in Him will produce fruit. Fruit bearing is crucial imagery of a Christian's life—it is the sign of a genuine faith relationship with Jesus.[4]

In John's letters, there is an example of some who did not abide (1 John 2:18-19), and evidence of this is that they bore either bad fruit or no fruit.[5]

Every genuine Christian has this "abiding" relationship with God, which is constantly (though not always quickly) growing toward Christ, learning to imitate Him, drawing from His resources. John makes it clear in this letter that the person who does not have this type of relationship is not a believer at all, despite what he or she may claim.[6]

1. 1 John 2:19, 24, 27, 28 (cf. Matthew 10:22; 13:1–9, 18–23; John 8:31; 15:1–27; 1 Corinthians 15:2; Galatians 6:1; Revelation 2:2, 7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7)
2. Adapted from Bob Utley, "1 John 2:3–3:3" Bible.Org, last modified May 7, 2011.
3. Romans 8:28–30; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 4:19; Ephesians 1:4; 4:13; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 4:3; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Titus 2:4; 1 Peter 1:15
4. Matthew 7:13–23; 13:1–23
5. Utley, "1 John 2:3–3:3" Bible.Org, Special Topic: "Abiding."
6. Adapted from W. Hall Harris III, "7. Exegetical Commentary on 1 John 2:3-11," Bible.Org, last modified July 28, 2004.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

STEADFASTNESS

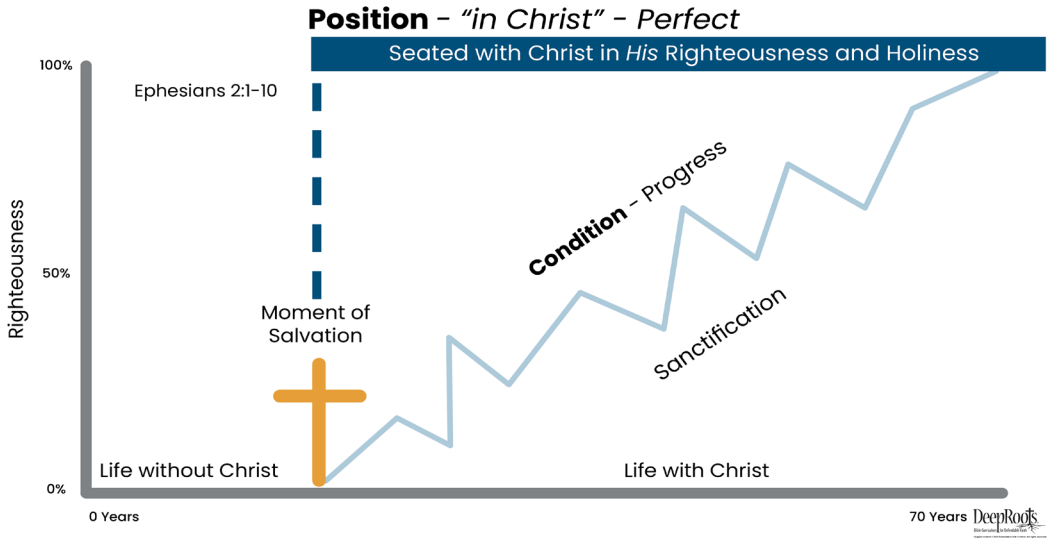
Steadfastness is the intended outcome of the believer's testing by trials. This word is frequently used in the New Testament and describes what Christians need to develop and lean into when they face adversity, temptation, and persecution.[1] Scholars have used "fortitude," "staying power," and "heroic endurance" to convey the meaning of the word. Christians are to exercise "patience" toward *people* and steadfastness toward *difficulties*.

Anker, *Reading Devotions to Grandfather*, 1893

Steadfastness is not a passive submission to circumstances. Instead, it is a strong and active response to hardship.[2] James is teaching believers to be fully committed to God, walking out their faith with perseverance, joy, and true grit.[3] The believer is asked to respond to trials with joy, then, because he knows that those trials are working to produce a deeper, stronger, more certain faith.

James instructs believers to *"let steadfastness have its full effect."* The full effect ("perfect" or "complete" work) means perfection and wholeness in Christian character. Becoming perfect and complete is what should result from a genuinely Christian response to trials.

What does James mean by this *perfection*? Perfection here refers to a future gift—something the Christian progresses toward in the power of the Holy Spirit but will not fully attain until the believer's sanctification is complete when he enters heaven.[4] Only then will the believer's condition in Christ completely catch up to his position in Christ.[5]



1. Lk. 8:15, 2 Thes. 1:4; Rev. 2:2; 13:10
2. This sequence of ideas and terminology is closely paralleled in Romans 5:3–4 and 1 Peter 1:6–7. It is probable that all three authors utilized language from a popular early Jewish and Christian tradition.
3. Gary M. Burge and Gene L.Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within its Cultural Contexts, 2nd Edition* (Zondervan, 2020), 507.
4. Adapted from Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James: An Introduction and Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1993), 60–62.
5. Roger Hershy, *The Finishers* (Cru Press, 2011), 260.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

WALKING IN THE COUNSEL OF THE WICKED—THE REGRESSION INTO SIN

Psalm 1 begins with a list of three things that a blessed man does not do: *"Blessed is the man who [1] walks not in the counsel of the wicked, [2] nor stands in the way of sinners, [3] nor sits in the seat of scoffers" (Psalm 1:1) (ESV).*

A closer examination of these three descriptions reveals a troubling series of images demonstrating man's regression from God's way into sin. The words used in each image illustrate a degeneration that ultimately ends with the ungodly being *"chaff that the wind drives away"*[1] if they do not repent and resist evil.

The verbs in each description show a regression in habit or conduct: *walk, stand, sit*. The Hebrew word for "walk" contains the idea of going along with, or following an action or lifestyle. "Stand," however, in the original language means to stop or be firm. Comparing the two images, the reader sees the walking person becoming established in the sin, no longer just following someone else. The final verb, "sit," brings with it the meaning of dwelling or abiding and implies contentment and comfort in the position. Man has become settled in his sin.

The direct objects in the images show a change in openness: *counsel, way, seat*. "Counsel" in Hebrew refers to a mental attitude, state of mind, or viewpoint that determines the decisions we make. Initially one begins to give more weight to experience and popular opinion than God's Word. The word for "way" means a path, course of action, journey, or work. Thought patterns become actions—thinking like the world leads to acting like the world. And finally, according to the expression, if you sit in someone's seat, you become what they are. Spending time sitting with scoffers demonstrates an acceptance of and conformance to the scoffers' lifestyles.

The final words in each image show the growth of evil: *wicked, sinners, scoffers*. In Hebrew, "wicked" has the root idea of being unstable or loose. This is a looseness of morals, being controlled by one's own emotions, but it also means a looseness from God, going after one's own desires. "Sin" is an archery term, meaning to miss the mark. While all of us have sinned and missed the mark of God's perfect will, in this context, the word "sinners" refers to those who deliberately chose a life contrary to God's Word. Scoffers take sin a step further. Grammatically, the word "scoffer" refers to a person who habitually and actively puts down the things of the Lord. The scoffer can mock God not only with words but also with a lifestyle that demonstrates scorn toward what Scripture says.

These regressive images serve as a warning. They teach that people cannot stay neutral toward God. Passivity actually leads farther into sin, and a little wickedness becomes scoffing against the Most High. People cannot stay in the same place in their spiritual life; they will either grow closer to God or drift farther from Him. To avoid regression, we must actively pursue God and His Word. The rest of Psalm 1 goes on to describe how to do this.[2]

1. Psalm 1:4b
2. Adapted from J. Hampton Keathley, III, "Psalm 1: Two Ways of Life—A Psalm of Wisdom," Bible.org, accessed April 11, 2023.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

THE LORD'S CORRECTION

Raphael, *Christ's Charge to Peter*, 1516

The author of Hebrews reminds us that *"the Father. . . disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness"* (Hebrews 12:9–10). When we sin, God the Father is grieved, much as an earthly father is grieved when his children disobey, and He disciplines us. A similar theme is found in Revelation 3, where the risen Christ speaks from heaven to the church of Laodicea, saying, *"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent"* (Revelation 3:19). Here again, love and reproof of sin are connected in the same statement.[1] Just as earthly children grow in obedience and righteousness when they are disciplined properly by their earthly fathers, so we grow in righteousness and holiness when we are disciplined by our heavenly Father.[2]

The writer of Hebrews, while quoting Proverbs 3:11–12, comments, *"It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"* (Hebrews 12:7). Discipline may not be pleasant at the moment of application, but it is beneficial in the long term. Love is concern and action for the ultimate welfare of another. Therefore, discipline should be thought of as evidence of love rather than of lack of love.[3]

Proverbs 3:11–12 says, *"[11]My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, [12]for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights."* The rebuke is given by our Father because we are not living the way we should be living.[4] But the purpose of the discipline, or the rebuke, is to lead us back onto His right path.

1. Adapted from Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Zondervan Academic, 2020), 635.
2. Adapted from Grudem, *Systematic Theology,* 918.
3. Adapted from Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology, 3rd Ed.* (Baker Academic, 2013), 894.
4. Adapted from Bruce K Waltke, *"Lesson 8: Does Proverbs Promise Too Much? (3:1–12),"* Biblicaltraining.org, accessed February 25, 2025.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

VARIOUS TRIALS

The word "various" describes what kind of trials we will face. "Various" literally means "many colored" or "rainbowed" (all types). In I Peter 4:10 the same word is used to describe God's grace.[1] For every trial we face, there is a matching grace (divine enabling) from God! James wants believers to become mature and stable in their faith, and to do so, they need to maintain a proper attitude toward difficulties and potential stumbling blocks.

The word translated "trial" has two basic meanings in the New Testament. It can refer to the inner temptation to sin, but at other times, it refers to external suffering, particularly persecution.[2] In James 1:2, the term used for "trial" points to external suffering. The word *various* refers both to the common kinds of difficulties all people face and to the specific persecution Christians face because of their faith. Therefore, illness, financial struggles, and social persecution are all included in the *various trials*.[3]

Believers are instructed to consider trials, whatever their form, to be a reason for rejoicing, because trials are God's way of maturing us. Maturity is not theological knowledge only, but daily faithful endurance. Maturity is *who we are*, not merely what we know. The fruit of our faith is seen and developed in crisis.[4] Various trials strengthen us and our confidence in God.[5]

1. The New American Standard Bible translates "various" as "manifold" in 1 Peter 1:6, where it describes various trials and in 1 Peter 4:10, where it describes God's various graces. Adapted from Bob Utley, "James 1," Bible.org. November 12, 2012.
2. 1 Timothy 6:9; 1 Peter 4:12
3. Adapted from Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James: An Introduction and Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1993), 59–60.
4. Hebrews 5:8-9. Adapted from Utley, "James 1," Bible.org.
5. Adapted from Moo, *The Letter of James*, 59–60.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

COUNTING IT ALL JOY

When James encourages believers to "count it all joy," he uses an imperative, or command. James is calling on believers to make a decisive personal choice about how they face life situations. This means responding with joy when we face trials. The term "count it" in Greek means "add it all up." While our list of struggles can seem longer than the good circumstances in our lives, knowing Christ tips the scales since He is worth far more than anything we could gain in this world (Philippians 3:7–8).[1]

The command is absolute, suggesting the need for a definitive decision to take up a joyful attitude. The "all" modifying "joy" might suggest that the joy is to be unmixed with other emotions—"count it *only* joy" or "*nothing but* joy"—but most likely it emphasizes the quality of the joy itself (supreme joy). What is remarkable about this command is that it applies to a situation in which a joyful reaction would be most unnatural: *"when you meet trials of various kinds."*

Believers should react with joy when faced with various trials because these trials are part of God's testing that refines our faith. In some translations, the word "testing" refers to the process by which silver or gold is refined by fire, burning away the impurities. So, this suffering is a means by which our faith, tested in the fires of adversity, can be purified of anything worthless and thereby strengthened.[2]

In this passage, James is not saying that trials are joy but that their possible results are—a deeper knowledge of Christ and strengthened, mature faith. These are the results that should cause us to rejoice.

1. Adapted from Bob Utley, "James 1," Bible.org, accessed November 8, 2024.
2. Adapted from Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James: Introduction and Commentary* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 59–61.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

THE PATIENCE OF GOD

God hates sin because He loves us so much and knows how sin destroys the life He created for us. While we should reject any idea of God being angry in a temperamental human sense, we cannot do away with the biblical concept of His wrath, which is His settled hatred of and opposition to all sin.[1] This is in line with His righteous character. Anger is not something that God chooses to feel, but because He is holy, He cannot tolerate sin.[2] We must avoid thinking of God's anger as being excessively emotional. It is not as if He is seething with anger, His temper virtually surging out of control. He is capable of exercising patience and long-suffering, and He does so. God is not somehow frustrated by our sin, but rather, disappointed.[3]

Verse 8 of Psalm 145 is a verse of great hope for sinners![4] Despite His people's frequent failures, the Lord remains patient with them and faithful to His existing covenant with them. God's patience was exemplified even during the days before the flood. Although the people were disobedient, *"God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared" (1 Peter 3:20b).* God is patient, *"not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9b).* In delaying punishment, God shows clearly that He has no pleasure in executing final judgment but rather delights in the salvation of men and women.[5]

1. Adapted from Steven J. Cole, "Lesson 5: The Key to Holiness (1 John 2:1–2)," Bible.org, last updated May 31, 2013.
2. Habakkuk 1:13
3. Adapted from Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 551–552.
4. Adapted from Steven J. Cole, "Psalm 145: God Fanatics," Bible.org, accessed May 22, 2025.
5. Adapted from Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 810.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

CRYING OUT TO GOD

The Lord is always available to those who call out to Him sincerely. His followers, who love and fear Him, are those who call on Him in truth.

"[18]The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. [19]He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them" (Psalm 145:18–19) (ESV).

So when we, as believers, call upon Him, He will be near to us and hear our cry to save us. He withholds what is harmful, and He grants what is for our good.[1]

Moreover, the Lord is ever available to those who are in need and "call on Him in truth."[2] The phrase "the Lord is near" in Psalm 145:18 emphasizes the accessibility of God, while Psalm 145:5 denotes His greatness.[3] God's faithful followers not only call to him expectantly, but also revere and genuinely love Him. Believers may count on God's deliverance in times of need or trouble and His protection in times of danger.[4]

1. If, for our greater good, God does not prevent difficulties, He remains with us and for us, giving us strength to endure them. Isaiah 41:10; 1 Peter 1:6–7. Adapted from Steven J. Cole, "Psalm 145: God Fanatics," Bible.org, accessed May 22, 2025.
2. Adapted from Richard D. Patterson, "Psalm 45: A Song in 'G Major,'" Bible.org, accessed May 22, 2025.
3. Adapted from Bob Utley, "Psalm 145."
4. Adapted from Patterson, "Psalm 45: A Song in 'G Major.'"

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